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GOD IN SCIENCE AND RELIGION.¹

“POSITIVE knowledge,” says Mr. Herbert Spencer, “does not, and never can, fill the whole region of possible thought.” However much knowledge may “grow from more to more,” there must needs ever be, for our limited capacities, a limitless residuum of the unknown. Still we must perforce think of this unknown, guess at it, form some conception of it, and in some way or other express our conceptions. And we can only do so in terms of what we do know. We must in fact use “symbols.”

Undoubtedly the modern philosophy which resolves all things into matter and energy, and accounts for all phenomena by the interaction of these two categories, seems to many minds to have left no room for God. “I have no need of that hypothesis,” says the French savant. But the mind will never be satisfied with such a negation. This is simply “to make a solitude and call it peace.”

To believe that the human intellect is merely the last and highest product of evolution, the mere resultant of the interaction of matter and force, and that it will come to an end when this globe grows dead and cold, is impossible. That there is nothing higher, vaster, nobler, in all this universe, than the human mind with its limitations, is incredible.

To adopt Mr. H. Spencer’s words: “We have an indefinite consciousness of an absolute reality transcending relations”—“an inscrutable power manifested through all phenomena”—“an Ulti-

¹ Thoughts suggested by Dr. Carus’s essay in *The Monist*, April, 1898, on “The Unmateriality of the Soul and God.”

mate Reality which underlies all phenomena." This "Ultimate Reality" of the philosopher is, to the theist, God.

But the question—What *is* God? What is the nature, the "suchness," of this Ultimate Reality?—must ever remain insoluble. The words inscribed on the Temple of Isis in the Childhood of Religion, are true still:

Ἐγὼ εἰμι πᾶν τὸ γεγενὸς καὶ ὄν καὶ ἐσόμενον καὶ τὸν ἐμὸν πέπλον οὐδεὶς
 πω θνητὸς ἀπεκάλυψε.

"I am all that was and is and shall be, and my veil hath no mortal ever lifted."

Still we must think, must guess, must frame theories. And it is remarkable that in those theories, among all nations, in all ages, there should have been so much agreement, as Mr. Edmund Noble has pointed out, in his valuable article on "Some Parallels Between Theology and Science," in *The Open Court* of April last. This article suggests that a *modus vivendi* might be arrived at by all "seekers after God" (to use St. Paul's phrase, Acts xvii. 27). All the various terms used to express the "Ultimate Reality" seem to be aiming at the same thing: although whatever "symbol" is adopted must needs be inadequate, owing to the limitations of thought and, still more, of language; "the incompetency of the conditioned to grasp the unconditioned."

The Christian theist says, "God is spirit." But the question arises, What *is* "spirit"? Is it matter? Is it energy? Or is it a *tertium quid*? Judge Chase's view, which is that of most believers in the immortality of the soul, has been rightly challenged by Dr. Carus (p. 426) as being in fact a materialist one: for his d_2x , attenuated to any degree, is still the product of the factor x . Mr. Herbert Spencer's formula, "The infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed," would seem to point to energy as, in his view, the equivalent of the theological "spirit." But he himself shows elsewhere how impossible it is to conceive of energy as abstracted from matter. If then neither of these can be accepted as definitions of (the theological) "spirit," we must have recourse to the "*tertium quid*." And how shall we name it?

It seems to me that the *idea* of Plato—the *οὐσία* of the Greek

Fathers—the *substantia* of the Latins—the *form* of modern philosophy, are, one and all, efforts to express the same thought of pure being : and all fail in the last analysis, because they are but “symbols” to express what “transcends the bounds of distinct thought.”

The word “substance” in mediæval theology, and in such documents as the Athanasian Creed, is an endeavor to express the “underlying reality,” apart from all “accidents,” that is to say in modern terms, apart from all matter and energy. But the word “substance”—and with it the idea it was intended to connote—has through time become perverted : for now, when we speak of a “substantial house” or a “substantial dinner,” we mean the very opposite of “immaterial.”

The same danger of misapprehension and of perversion awaits the word “form” : for “form” inevitably suggests “shape” ; and “shape” is too intimately connected with the material “accidents” of any “substance” to be abstracted from them even mentally.

Dr. Carus’s illustration : “That $1 + 1 = 2$ is eternally true, though matter had never existed”—may be demurred to. For when we think or speak of 1 or 2, we must needs ask, one *what* ? or two *what* ? The more appropriate formula would seem to be, $0 + 0 = 0$, or $0 \times$ (anything whatever) is still $= 0$.

Every term that the theist can use is open to objection from the same cause, viz., the limitations of thought and of language. Such is the case with the word “person” or “personality.” We use it because it is the best we can do. Professor Le Conte (*Evolution and Its Relation to Christian Thought*, Part III. Chap. 6, p. 341) well says :

“I have used the word personality as expressing the nature of God. But let me not be misunderstood. I know well we cannot conceive clearly of an infinite unconditioned personality. Deeply considered it seems nothing short of a contradiction in terms. All I insist on is this : In our view of the nature of God, the choice is not between personality and something *lower* than personality, viz., an *unconscious force* operating nature by *necessity*, as the materialists and pantheists would have us believe ; but between personality as we know it in ourselves and something inconceivably *higher* than personality. Language is so poor that we

are obliged to represent even *our* mental phenomena by physical images. How much more, then, the divine nature by its human image! Self-conscious personality is the highest thing we know or can conceive. We offer Him the very best and truest we have when we call Him a person; even though we know that this, our best, falls far short of the infinite reality."

To this agree the words of Mr. H. Spencer (*First Principles*, Part I. Section 31).

"Is it not just possible that there is a mode of being as much transcending intelligence and will as these transcend mechanical motion? It is true that we are totally unable to conceive any such higher mode of being. But this is not a reason for questioning its existence; it is rather the reverse."

The Christian theologian can accept all that.

Mr. Matthew Arnold in *Literature and Dogma* satirised the word "Person" as being anthropomorphic, and sought to avoid all anthropomorphism by his formula, "The Eternal Not-ourselves that makes for righteousness." But Dr. Abbott (in *Through Nature to Christ*) pointed out that the very word "makes" subjects Mr. Arnold's formula to the charge of anthropomorphism, or something lower. An amusing instance of avoiding Charybdis only to fall into Scylla was given by Rev. Dr. McQueary, who a few years ago startled the Christian world by forsaking the "orthodox" faith. He published a work (I have it not by me and forget its title) as his Apologia, in which he gives expression to his recoil from the "anthropomorphism" of Christianity. But when he sets out to give us his own views of the relation between God and the Universe, he says he believes that "God secretes nature as a snail secretes its shell!" Surely any amount of anthropomorphism is superior to this gasteropodomorphism!

We might, indeed, speak of super-personality, as Judge Chase and Dr. Carus suggest: but I fear such a term in ordinary conventional use would convey to the minds of the many no meaning whatever, however appreciated by profounder thinkers.

The illustration which Plato gives in the *Phædo* of the soul being the Harmony and the body the material Lyre, is very beautiful; so also is Dr. Carus's illustration (p. 431) of the rainbow as distinct from the shower on which it appears. The rainbow re-

mains the same, while the raindrops are ever changing. So the ego of the individual persists, while the atoms of his body are in a constant state of flux. But the objection raised by the companions of Socrates was not fully met by him, viz. Though the lyre be not the music, yet when the lyre is destroyed the music is non-existent save as a memory. So when the shower is over, the rainbow is no more. Neither the music nor the rainbow can exist without air-vibrations. And the question forces itself upon us: When the body is dissolved, does the soul—the ego—survive only as the tune or the rainbow survives, i. e., as a memory, or idea, or form, of what once was, or of what will recur when the lyre is reconstructed or the shower falls again?

The popular phrase "the immortality of the soul" and the old arguments on which it was based, viz., that the soul is an immaterial essence, and therefore indivisible, and therefore indestructible, are not, we admit, scientifically tenable. But this does not disturb the Christian, for in fact "the immortality of the soul" is not an article of his creed. We confess, "I believe in the resurrection of the dead." Now, to many this may seem still more absurd than the doctrine of the indivisibility and immortality of the soul. But I think we may see our way out of this difficulty. Dr. Carus says (p. 439): "In the soul-life of mankind are the mansions in which there is room for us all. There we shall be preserved with all our peculiar idiosyncrasies in our personal identity." Every Christian will heartily assent to that: and I conceive the resurrection of the dead means that, and something more. We thereby imply that our future life will be—not a mere memory—not a vague, shadowy, purposeless existence of highly attenuated ether—not like the "shades" of the classics—but an organic one. There are "many mansions" in the Father's house, countless millions of globes around us. May not the Father transport us to some of these, with our memory of the old terrestrial life, "with all our peculiar idiosyncrasies in our personal identity"?—and yet in an organic form suitable to our new environments? M. Camille Flammarion, in his charming romance *Lumen* suggests this. And it seems to me that such an idea is quite compatible with the principles of Monism.

The music will again be heard when the lyre is reconstructed, or rather when a nobler organ is furnished to reproduce it. The rainbow will reappear under more perfect conditions. The ego will have its personal identity, but enlarged and glorified, with capabilities which we cannot now conceive, because in its new environment it will have its appropriate organism. And so we interpret St. Paul's words, that we shall be "not unclothed but clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven" (2 Cor. v.).

After all, it is a comfort to think that all who hold "the Religion of Science" can come to a consensus on the scheme exhibited by Dr. Carus. We all believe in God the Father,—we all cry, "Nearer, my God, to thee!"—We all hold (p. 425) that "God is not only the Father, but also the Son . . . God is not only the Logos as the world-order, but also the Logos that has become flesh."

These are the great truths: these, however much the "wise and prudent" may speculate as to the mode, are the truths that have all along been "revealed unto babes" (3 Matt. xi. 25), in babes' language, perhaps, but that was needful. The "babes," physical and intellectual, must ever form the vast proportion of mankind; the "wise and prudent"—the profounder thinkers—must always be the few. Is it not well, then, that we should have a popular and conventional terminology in religion for the "babes," even if we adopt an academic terminology to satisfy the "wise and prudent"? In other words, must we not have *always* an exoteric as well as an esoteric presentment of religion? Especially as they both mean the same thing; they both bear the same message, whether to the wise and prudent or to the babes:—"God so loved the world that He sent His Son."

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